

Australian Kriol

Australian Kriol also known as **Roper River Kriol**, **Fitzroy Valley Kriol**, **Northern Australian Creole** or **Aboriginal English**^[4] is an [English-based creole language](#) that developed from a [pidgin](#) used initially in the region of [Sydney](#) and [Newcastle](#) in [New South Wales](#), Australia, in the early days of [European colonisation](#). Later, it was spoken by groups further west and north. The pidgin died out in most parts of the country, except in the [Northern Territory](#), where the contact between European settlers, the Chinese and other Asians, and the [Aboriginal Australians](#) in the northern regions has maintained a vibrant use of the language, which is spoken by about 30,000 people. Despite its similarities to English in vocabulary, it has a distinct syntactic structure and grammar. It is a language in its own right and is distinct from [Torres Strait Creole](#).

History

European settlement in the [Northern Territory](#) was attempted over a period of about forty years. Settlement finally succeeded in 1870 with the founding of [Darwin](#), and an influx of both English and [Chinese](#) speakers followed. To communicate between both groups and the local Aboriginal people, [pidgins](#) developed throughout the territory based on Port Jackson Pidgin English (PJPE). By 1900 PJPE had developed into Northern Territory Pidgin English (NTPE) was widespread and well understood. Then by 1908 NTPE would [creolize](#) into Australian Kriol.^[5]

It creolized first in the Roper River Mission (Ngukurr), where cattle stations were established and a township developed.

During that period, relations between the native and European people were strained. Aboriginal people fiercely defended their lands. However, the control of lands was eventually seized by the settlers, when a cattle company acquired much of the area. The settlers became more determined to take full control of the land from the native people and carried out a campaign to do so.

The resettlements and land seizures nearly annihilated the indigenous population was a major factor in the development of the creole, as it created drastic social change.

Another factor in the development of Kriol was the establishment of a community of [Anglican](#) missionaries in the [Roper River](#) region in 1908. That brought together around 200 people from eight different aboriginal ethnic groups, who spoke different native languages, Although adult members of these groups were multilingual because of frequent meetings and ceremonies. Children from these groups were educated in English, necessitating use of a lingua franca. Children from these communities disseminates English features throughout their community.

Although the relations between the missionaries and Aboriginal people were friendly, the missionaries were not responsible for the development of Kriol. In fact, they tried to introduce [Standard English](#) as the official language for the mission, which the Aboriginal children used in class and with the missionaries, but Kriol still flourished.

Kriol was not recognised as a language until the 1970s, as it was regarded as a dialect of English, rather than a language in its own right.

Features

Grammar

As a general rule the grammar of Kriol is a simplified version of that found in [English](#). It has an [SVO word order](#) and similar to English, word order is used over [inflections](#) or subject object [affixation](#) or verbs to specify meaning.^[6] Kriol pronouns differentiate between different between [first](#), [second](#) and [third person](#), as well as between singular, [plural](#), and dual plural inclusive and exclusive pronouns first person. They also differentiate between [Subject](#), [Object](#), Independent Pronoun, and Adnominal [Possessive](#). There are also [Reflexive](#) and [Reciprocal pronouns](#) There is a large variety in the specific pronouns and they vary largely between dialects.^[7]

Contributing languages

The primary contributing languages of Kriol is English but it contains influence from: [Alawa](#), [Marra](#), [Ngalakgan](#), [Wandarrang](#), [Mangarrayi](#), [Ngandi](#), [Nunggubuyu](#), [Jawoyn](#), [Dalabon](#),

Australian Kriol	
Native to	Australia
Region	Roper River , Katherine areas , Ngukurr , Northern Territory ; Kimberley , Western Australia ; Gulf Country , Lower Cape York Peninsula , Queensland
Ethnicity	Aboriginal Australians
Native speakers	7,500 (2021 census) ^[1] L2 speakers : 10,000 (1991) ^[2]
Language family	English Creole <ul style="list-style-type: none">Pacific<ul style="list-style-type: none">Australian Kriol
Early forms	Port Jackson Pidgin English <ul style="list-style-type: none">Northern Territory Pidgin English
Dialects	Rope River Kriol Bamyili Creole Barkly Kriol Fitzroy Valley Kriol Daly River Kriol
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	rop
Glottolog	krio1252 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/id/krio1252)
AIATSIS ^[3]	P1 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/P1)
Linguasphere	52-ABB-ca (varieties: 52-ABB-caa to -caf)

Rembarrnga, Barunga, Beswick, Jaminjung, Ngarinyman, Wardaman, Walmatjari, Djaru, Miriwoong, and Gija.^[7]

Phonology

Consonants^[6]

	Labiodental/Interdental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Alveopalatal	Velar	Glottal	Bilabial
Voiced Stop		d	rd	j	g		b
Voiceless Stop	f, th	s				h	
Nasal Fricative		n	rn	ny	ng		m
Lateral Fricative		l	rl	ly			
Rhotics/Semivowels		rr	r	y			w

Vowels^[4]

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

Dialects

Dialects of Kriol include Roper River Kriol (Roper River Pidgin), Bamyili Creole (from the Barunga area), Barkly Kriol, Fitzroy Valley Kriol, and Daly River Kriol.^[2]

Kriol is very widely spoken in the Katherine area, but there are minor differences between the varieties of Kriol spoken in particular areas. Some speakers of Kriol prefer to refer to their language by their unique name. However, the varieties are quite similar. Debate is ongoing about whether the varieties should be named differently to highlight their different social significance, or the varieties should all be lumped into one big category of Kriol.

The differences are not actually that large. Mari Rhydwen compares the distinction to the distinction between American and British English.

Roper River (Ngukurr) Kriol is also spoken in Barunga, and in the Daly River area, a mutually-intelligible variety is spoken, but Daly River speakers do not consider themselves to be Kriol speakers. There is the question of whether the varieties should be understood as different forms of Kriol to strengthen the identities of the respective region, or they all should be seen as Kriol and potentially have a better chance of funding for bilingual education programs.

Creolisation

There is also a creole language based off a mix of Kriol and [Gurndji](#) called [Gurndji Creole](#)^[8]

Status

A problem facing many communities in Northern Australia is that creole-speaking children are treated as if they speak English badly and so they do not receive education in English as a second language. On the other hand, because they are not regarded as having a native mother tongue, they are denied access to education in their traditional language.

The only official bilingual language program in Kriol is at [Barunga](#), which was established during the [Whitlam government](#), and has successfully included Kriol as both a medium and an object of study. Funding is scarce for any further development of programs. Although Kriol is widely spoken, its literal translation is minimal, with the exception of the Bible, and stories produced for the bilingual program which are available through the [Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages](#). This means that literacy rates of Kriol are quite low. Apart from practical implications of that, especially if English literacy is also low (i.e., written communication, education opportunities), it means that traditional stories are either not recorded in written form, or the [Ngukurr](#) people must rely on texts from Barunga, which may lessen the identity distinction between the two groups. However, Aboriginal cultures are not traditionally rooted in written records and so the lack of written versions of texts may be a function of the oral nature of Aboriginal storytelling.

Media



Located at the [Museum of the Bible](#), a copy of the Australian Kriol Bible (*Holi Baibul*) is on display.

Bible translation

On 5 May 2007, the first complete edition of the [Bible](#) in the Kriol language was launched at [Katherine](#) in the Northern Territory. Translation took over 29 years. It was undertaken by a team of native Kriol speakers led by Rev. Canon Gumbuli Wurrumara and specialists from the Society for Australian Indigenous Languages.

The Kriol Bible is the first complete edition of the Bible in any Indigenous Australian language. The publication was a joint venture of The Bible Society, Lutheran Bible Translators, [The Church Missionary Society](#), the [Anglican church](#), [Wycliffe Bible Translators](#), and the Australian Society of Indigenous Languages.^[9]

Online

Online there are several videos and texts available in Kriol, as well as resources for learning the language. There is also currently an Australian Kriol Wikipedia currently on the [Wikimedia Incubator](#).

Sample text

Genesis 1:1-2

Kriol ^[10]	English ^[11]
Orait, longtaim wen God bin stat meigimbat ebrijing, nomo enijing bin jidan. Imbin jis eniwei, nomo garram enijing. Oni strongbala woda bin goran goran ebriwei, en imbin brabli dakbala, en det Spirit blanga God bin mubabat ontop langa det woda.	In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

References

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4. *The Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures*. Oxford. p. 1.

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 11. "Bible Gateway passage: Genesis 1:1-2 - New International Version" (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201%3A1-2&version=NIV>) . *Bible Gateway*. Retrieved 24 June 2024.
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External links

- [Meigim Kriol Strongbala](https://meigimkriolstrongbala.org.au/rop/) (<https://meigimkriolstrongbala.org.au/rop/>) Bilingual Kriol-English website providing news and information on Kriol.
- [Ngukurr Community](https://web.archive.org/web/20120328131758/http://www.ngukurr.org/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120328131758/http://www.ngukurr.org/>) site for the main Aboriginal Community producing Kriol language materials.
- [Kriol language resources](https://web.archive.org/web/20120328131758/http://www.kriolinfo.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120328131758/http://www.kriolinfo.com/>)
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